

## **2002 GRI Bill Analysis Assignment**

Bill #: Senate Bill #900

Printer's # 1061

Prime Sponsor: Hughes

This bill is designed to establish the "Breaking the Silence" Grant Program in Pennsylvania. The stated purpose of the bill is to reduce the stigma that society places upon individuals with mental illness. It is proposed that this would happen by increasing the public's knowledge about mental health, mental illness, and treatment available for mental illness. The bill goes on to list eleven "findings" related to stigma of individuals with mental illness, which are somewhat obvious statements to those of us who work with these individuals every day. The responsibility for enacting this bill would fall to the Department of Public Welfare. In fact, the bill indicates that the Secretary of the Department of Public Welfare would have the power and duty to "make grants to programs that decrease the stigma toward people with mental illness" and to set standards that these programs must meet. The bill also includes the development of an Advisory Board comprised of five mental health practitioners, five individuals receiving treatment for mental illness, and five parents of children receiving mental health services. These individuals would be appointed to the Advisory Board by the Governor, the President pro tempore of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and the minority leaders of the Senate and the House. The board would meet annually and assist in developing the standards that programs must meet in order to be eligible for the grant program.

The bill includes an appropriation of \$8,000,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Public Welfare for the establishment of this grant program.

It would seem that any legislation that can assist in reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness and its treatment would be a positive thing for our system, and definitely in the best interest of the public. However, this bill does raise some questions in my mind. First, there is no clear application process outlined as to how providers or mental health organizations would access a grant under this program. Also, the decision-making for allocating the eight million dollars seems to rest solely with the secretary of the Department of Public Welfare. It would seem that the Advisory Board would have a larger role in allocating the funds to deserving efforts. Additionally, the responsibility for reporting results of the grant program falls to the Department of Public Welfare. It would seem that this would be a very time consuming process. Therefore, the biggest question in my mind would be how much of the eight million dollars would be used for "administrative" costs and how much would be available for the grants to deserving community programs that would be creating projects to reduce the stigma placed on individuals with mental illness.